



Educating, Engaging and Mobilizing Parents to Take
Action on Issues that Matter Most To Them...

Testimony before Education Committee

S.B. 176: An Act Concerning the Smart Start Program

**S.B. 178: An Act Concerning the Legislative Commissioners' Recommendations
for Technical Revisions to the Education & Early Childhood Statutes**

H.B. 5306: An Act Concerning Recommendations of the Office of Early Childhood

H.B. 5308: An Act Concerning a General Education Multi-Tiered System of Instruction & Supports

Testimony by Marilyn Calderón, Executive Director

Connecticut Parent Power

Wednesday, February 24, 2016

Good afternoon, Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and distinguished members of the Education Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

I am Marilyn Calderón, Executive Director of Connecticut Parent Power a statewide parent-led organization that engages, educates and mobilizes diverse parents from across the state to act on issues that matter most to them improving outcomes for all children in areas of early childhood, equitable care/education, health care reform and K-12 school systems.

Connecticut Parent Power works hand in hand with collaborative statewide partners that include, but are not limited to, the Connecticut Association of Human Services, Connecticut Voices for Children, the Early Childhood Alliance and All Our Kin whom all support equitable outcomes for all Connecticut children and their families.

Connecticut Parent Power would like to take a moment to commend the legislature for their shared vision in passing legislative laws that promote the wellness of all children and their families to be able to access quality care and educational services that truly promote preventative benchmarks to ensure that all families succeed with an equitable return on investment socially, emotionally, physically and academically. When we look at the following bills:

S.B. 176: An Act Concerning the Smart Start Program we support, but with cautionary measures.

S.B. 178: An Act Concerning the Legislative Commissioners' Recommendations for Technical Revisions to the Education & Early Childhood Statutes and **H.B. 5306: An Act Concerning Recommendations of the Office of Early Childhood** encourage to give more power to the parents/constituents versus the commissioners to ensure decisions are guided/decided by the people versus government at all costs, as this is what our Democracy is built upon for and with our community parents and constituents.

H.B. 5308: An Act Concerning a General Education Multi-Tiered System of Instruction & Supports

As we look at what needs to happen in our state at this time now with so many fiscal hardships faced, we need to ensure that all elements of legislation, like the aforementioned proposed, are really in the best interest of our parents, their children and their families, alongside the providers that are executing services and programs day in and day out without compromising the well-being of our most vulnerable, our precious children in early care and education programs with highly qualified staff. We are in support of providing our designated Smart Start spaces to our most vulnerable children and families with a 60/40% rate and possible 50/50% change ONLY IF priority is always given to our most at need families (i.e., meaning having a provision that must include the outreach efforts that Smart Start location has to



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include our poorest families having first choice to take part in the spaces/places of quality care). Our thought is: we'd rather use all of our spaces and places to the best of our ability to ensure that culturally rich children from all walks of life are able to benefit from a diverse cohort of children learning and growing together in quality settings with minimal challenges. However, we want to ensure that we are not compromising the integrity of our existing early care and education structure. Parents should have the right to choose their child's full service early care and education program through the Smart Start spaces afforded to each community, however, it should never be on the backs of our most vulnerable families who may not know how to access this option with greater ease, as would a more affluent family. We think that lowering the threshold to a 50% is supported only if all efforts are exhausted and were made to serve poorer children in any given community, as its initial intent.

As for S.B. 178: An Act Concerning the Legislative Commissioners' Recommendations for Technical Revisions to the Education & Early Childhood Statutes and H.B. 5306: An Act Concerning Recommendations of the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) both bills with recommendations should only be made with the voices of our statewide parents at the forefront on what is necessary for their child(ren) to be most successful in school and life in the long run. This is a technical bill piece that changes references to child care services to align with changes made in the OEC licensing statutes, which needs to be reflective by what parents want and need to be driven by Legislative Commissioners' that use parent solution based thinking and action steps as a guide to take into account, as they make their recommendations and decision making practices based on unwavering guidance, support and voices of parents, whom are their child's first and most influential teachers.

Regarding H.B. 5308: An Act Concerning a General Education Multi-Tiered System of Instruction & Supports we are in support of this bill especially as it looks to establish strong research based structures, strategies and methods that support the whole child/student by co-creating a positive school culture with restorative discipline practices that promotes inclusion to reduce suspension by using teachable moments that strengthen relationships with students, parents, faculty and community stakeholders. However, in section 3 regarding the implementation of universal screening practices for all children in literacy, reading, writing and mathematics: we are not fully opposed, but do want folks to move forward with a deeply rooted culturally sensitive process for typical and A-typical children in this section as all students learn differently and through a universal process can lose the essence of lifting each of their learning and processing styles to a more cookie cutting approach, which is detrimental for our most vulnerable children/students.

In closing, our CT Parent Power families and statewide partners look forward to your continued support on this critical bill as we know that you, the Education Committee, all care about the wellness of our most vulnerable children and parents by already building an Office of Early Childhood that embraces the ever changing two and even three generational household, in which our children live in, to promote the holistic success of the whole child and the whole family more intensely and intentionally. We just have to ensure that our streamlining of services and programs, alongside our collective decision making processes do not give the upper power to government commissioners, but lifts the voices of parents, children, families and constituents that deserve nothing but the best in one of the richest states in the country to have an equitable, accessible and supportive internal and external infrastructure that meets and exceeds the diverse needs of all children, parents, families, etc. no matter what their zip code or ethnic background is...Make it Truly a Smart Start, Middle and End for ALL!